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VIRGINIA IN 1785*(1).

(From a letter in the Collection of the Virginia Historical Society.)

Caroline County, Portobago Bay on Rappahannock River.

Virginia 24th March 1785

Dr Uncle

As I have written you in a former Letter of the 1st of January of my present situation, I shall say nothing more respecting that in this one, only that I am well, and as happy as any one could be in the like Circumstances. I shall now proceed to give you an imperfect Description of this Country, as far as my Knowledge x x x or information and time of Residence will Admit Of.

Norfolk which was the first place I went on Shore at, has been an Elegant, large Town before it was destroyed, chiefly Built of Brick, but now rebuilding mostly with Wood; such a vast heap of Ruins and Devastation, are almost impossible to have any Idea of unless seen, the Inhabitants before the War were almost all Scotch, and is likewise now, altho as I have been Informed there are not over 30 or 40 in it now, who possessed it before the War. They are very desirous of having a discenting Clergyman plac'd there, as they have [no] Worship of any kind, their Church being destroyed with the Town, which has been a most beautiful Edifice. I have been told by one of the principal Merchants they would subscribe 100 or 150 Guineas to a genteel well behaved Man.

(*1) The letter printed here has some mutilations and a number of words too faded or worn to be entirely legible; but not enough to affect the meaning. It was given to the Society by the eminent lawyer, Hon. Wm. Green, of Richmond, at the request of Governor Letcher. Mr. Green states that he understood Governor Letcher to say that the letter was found in Norfolk during the war of 1812. If this was so it is probable that the recipient of the letter or some of his descendants, settled in that town. The name Dickson has long been well known there. A Rev.

The Rent of ground to build Houses on, if convenient to business and Trade is exceedingly high. 100 G's p annum is not uncommon for a small Lott, such as Merchants could build Store-Houses upon. Tis very hard to purchase Lotts, for the Proprietors altho reduced to extreme poverty, many of them, will not sell out, but w'd choose rather to live miserably in the forests, until they recruit themselves by Letting [?] their Tenements, and such as are untaken [?] sell of the x x x the Old' ruins to pay the Taxes of the Place rather than sell out—such is their resolution to keep their possessions.

The Cause which appears to me of their Rebuilding the Town mostly with Wood, is this, the Proprietors will not let the Ground longer than the duration of Seven Years, the tenant being bound to Build and at the Expiration of that Term to deliver it up, of course anything that will answer the Business, or serve any way Tollerable for that time, is the Houses that are Built. However 'tis thought 'twill be the most flourishing Town in the State for Trade before many years, having the finest Harbour and most Convenient to Europe. Carpenters and Brick-Layers are much wanted in all the Towns, they had in Norfolk £5 p Month and Work bounded [sic] them through the year, and after 30s. p. Week for Jobbs of short standing—but indeed Workmen of all Denominations have most enormous prices for their Work. You have to pay from 18s to 25s for making a Suit of Clothes. They are very fond of Irish Emigration here, and it is Given as a Toast often at their Fairs, it really surprises me to see their inclined to give the preference to ye Irish or English, rather than the Scotch or French, altho the latter their assistants in the War, notwithstanding they seem to dislike them in General, and if there was a Bargain in any of their Merchandize w'd rather that an Englishman should have it than a Frenchman. The Benefits arising from

Robert Dickson was minister of Lynnhaven parish just before the Revolution, but he could hardly have been the person to whom the letter was written as the latter apparently had never been in America.

John Joyce, the writer, seems to have been at the time resident in the family of Thomas Lomax (1746-1811) of "Portobago," Caroline County, probably as a tutor.

Norfolk was burnt at various dates, in 1775 and 1776. It has been commonly stated that a considerable part of the town was burnt by

the Reformation [Revolution] I think are not as great as they expected. They themselves confess that they were better before the War than now, that is with respect to Taxes, which are very heavy upon them; Yet they dont [appear?] to Repent in the least what they have done, I believe they would do the same thing again were they put to the Trial, and much applauded the Irish for their Resolutions, and Spirit of Independence; but think you have let the time pass when it might have been in your power to have gained it, that is by joining them here while at Variance and England engaged but they despair of your gaining it now. We have had various acc'ts of your Disturbances here, we had once a Rumor that You were actually at War with England. But I have heard since that your Troubles are chiefly subsided, & only a few of a factious x x x eaded party & remain, that will be punished & some of your Ring-Leaders, as public examples. I wish sincerely your Troubles were at an end, & that I could be certified of it from Your Hand. They don't expect that the benefits of Reformation will be of much service to the present Generation, but that it will reach to their posterity, & that they perhaps are not paying so much as England would have imposed upon them, and after some time they expect to be better. People of any property suffered in general exceedingly, many of them from Wealth & affluence almost to Beggary.

Their Taxes seem to be increasing and lie very heavy upon Men of property; Besides their Land Tax every thing they have are Tax'd *ad valorem*, every Negro Slave from 16 [years of age] tax'd 20s. & 10s. for Children from the Minute they are Born, which amounts to a very great Sum to such as have 150 or 200 Slaves such as Mr. Lomaxes, his Taxes amount to £350 ~~per~~ Annum. Cattle and all other Things are tax'd in proportion. The manner in which Land are Tax'd, there are inspectors Appointed to Value their Lands, then they have to pay so

Lord Dunmore; but the official report of the Virginia Commissioners in 1777 shows that he was responsible for a comparatively small part. The rest was done by Va. troops, sometime by order of the Convention and sometimes without.

In the Journal and Documents of the House of Delegates of Virginia 1835, the full report of the Commissioners made in 1777 is printed. It shows that 1331 houses, valued at £164148.8.1¾ were destroyed, as was

much $\frac{3}{4}$ Cent according to their property. Notwithstanding all this they tell me they are not clearing the Interest of the National Debt, therefore they are making more Taxes & Contributions, & raising their Tax upon Negroes.

In the Colony of Virginia are an accounted 73000 Tithables 55985 [white?] and the Residue consists of Negro Men and Women, the Number of Inhabitants are accounted, White and Black at 448008—a Negro Man or Woman between 15 and 40 are computed at an Average, in Value about £60. But a stout young fellow, particularly one of them who are of any Trade will sell at £100 and £120. I have known 15 sold at a time, some of them women and half of their Children, sell at 1000£. The value of the negroes in the State are accounted at a moderate Computation, worth £6378570. As to the Trade of the Colony its Staple is Tobacco. They export x x x x 60 or 7000 [Probably intended for 70,000] Hogsheads each w't 1000 pounds. The Common price here about Guinea 28 and 30s. Cwt. As to the Drink chiefly used in this Collony it is generally Cyder, every planter having an Orchard and they make from 1000 to 5 or 6000 according to their rank and Fortune.

As to the Soil it is very different in different parts, that which lies upon the Rivers are generally a Black Deep soil, which produces the largest Tobacco and all other Plants. But the land that lies distant from the Rivers are generally of a midling Quality yet produces Indian Corn sufficient for the Inhabitants, without the least manure (indeed the knowing little of manuring) who Chiefly use Bread made from this Grain particularly lower Classes, the very meanest and hilly Land are proper for the Peach Tree, every planter, almost having an Orchard of these Trees. The Brandy made from that Fruit I think is

personal property to the value of £12277.13.8 $\frac{3}{4}$. The names of property owners in the Borough of Norfolk who appear in the list are Francis McKerrell, Hodge Miller, Alexander Love, Wm. Smith, Thomas Drury, Edward Moseley, Phripp, Taylor & Co., James Archdeacon's estate, John Phripp's estate, Matthew Phripp, Phripp & Boudoin, Robert Tucker's estate, John Griffin, Seth Pointer, John Smith, Thomas Matthews, Anne Miller for life & James Taylor's reversion, John Kelsick's estate Samuel Blaws, Dr. James Taylor, Margaret Taylor's estate, Severn Eyre's estate, Jacob Williams, Society of Masons, Norfolk; John Godfrey, Dickerson Pryor, Cornelius Calvert, Hardress Waller, John Moody,

excellent and they [make?] it in general in sufficient quantities.

As to their Manufactures the Consist chiefly of Cotton, for very little Wool or Linnen Cloth is made in this province there being but few Sheep, & of Consequence broad-Cloaths are Extremely dear, I think in General 100 ^⁹/₁₀ Ct dearer than in Ireland, and the most of all Commodities which are Imported from Europe is all wear x x x & hardware. All Land that is clear is taken up with Tobacco and Grain, few of them understand the management of Flax. Most of the men as well as all of the Women of the Lower Classes wear Cotton Cloth of their own Manufacture, both summer & Winter, which grows here in abundance.

I have heard this Province Esteem'd the Richest (that is by its own Inhabitants) But from accounts I can learn, from those who have travelled the other Provinces, it is esteemed the Poorest, as to Household furniture it is thought to excel the other Provinces. They have an excellent Breed of English Horses. The Weather here is very variable particularly in spring and fall, in the mornings & evenings, you're like to freeze and in the middle of the day it is almost burning the soles of ones shoes—even in December, in the middle of the day it is scorchingly to warm, and we have Green Peas, and Flowers in Bloom, its Esteem'd the most sickly Province this Except Georgia & S. Carolina. Fevers and Agues, Plurises, Bilious Fevers rage Terribly—when I first landed The Agues and Fevers were about their last Stages, it appeared to me like a general Plague. There were no less than 7 seized with it in the same House where I was when I lodg'd during my stay there. Yet thank God I never was in the least affected with it altho I was sleeping in the room where they were raging out of their senses with it nor never had any sickness since I left x x x.

John James, Paul Proley [Proby], Richard Ingston, Nicholas Wonycutt, Mary Williamson, Paul Loyali, Loyall Newton & Co., Nathaniel Tatum, John Marnox, Wm. Bevan, Wm. Cornick, Cornelius Calvert son of Saunders, Zacha Hutchings, Henry Cornick, Samuel Tomlinson, John Collins, Wilson Newton's estate, Rebecca Newton and T. Jameson as joint tenants, John Mohun, Philip Carberry, Francis Haynes, Sarah Dyson, Henry Tucker's estate, George Jameson Sr., John Poole, John Wood, John Brodfoot, Ann Winterton, John Johnson, Thos. Thompson, James Bushel, Arthur Denby, Ralph Saunders estate, Wm. Westerhouse,

What accot I have given you is far from being a full or perfect one & it is only the outlines of my own observation & Conversation with others. Or to say even could I describe it fully w'd be giving an accot of America as I have heard some attributing the description of one part or in one Letter as the Description of America in general, which is entirely foolish, for this place and Ireland do not more widely differ in their ways & manner of x x x than this & other Parts of America.

The Gentlemen here particularly since Taxes became high upon Negroes seem to be willing to adopt x x x of Renting their Land to Tenants and dispose of their Slaves—for there is no such Thing as Tenants here as yet nor can they get any, Land is too plenty, there are Thousands of Acres lying uncultivated in one Continued Forrest. Gentlemen owning vast Plantations containing several Thousand Acres, consequently x x x x x 8th of it can be of any Present Advantage, or so x x x bring in any money yearly. There being no Tennants, the mode they have is this, they have an overseer or overseers & their slaves Clear and Plant Tobacco, Indian Corn, Wheat & sometimes Cotton. Few Oats are used here & what they have make use of it to feed their Cattle for they would not eat it; the x x x being tended, they carry their Tobacco to their Merchants for which they barter for such Commodities or Goods as they want, they who live 100 Miles and upwards in the back Country, they lay in Goods will serve them untill the following Year—and as to their Indian Corn there are Traders who come from Pennsylvania, New England, the Gersies & part of Maryland in little Vessels fitted for the purpose up the Navigable Rivers with such Commodities as they could want, and Take Corn in Exchange; for they raise no Indian Corn in the above mention'd places—

Howard Poole, Wm. Chisholm, Andrew Martin, Wm. Porter, John Nicholson, Most o'Brien, Thomas Price, County of Norfolk, Borough of Norfolk, Parish of Elizabeth River, William Calvert, Eliza Hansford, Thomas Talbot, John Gilchrist's orphans, John Ramsey, John Woodside, Stephen Wright's estate, Joseph Hutching's, estate, Wm. Aitcheson, John Calvert Joshua Wright, Thos. Claiborne's estate, Robert Waller, Rebecca Newton, Susanna Campbell, Wm. & Thos. Farmer, Edward Archer, John Archer, Hudson Brown, Richard Taylor, Matthias Christian, Charles Thomas, Daniel Hutchings, Nicholas Poole, John Ramsey orphan of James, Ann Wallis, Wm. Skinker, Bayshaw & Burgess, Town Point Company, John Bayne, Jonas Herbert, Elizabeth Ballard, John Williamson, Samuel Boush, John Browness, Thos. Breshaw, Barnaby Lorrain, Richard

therefore for 100£ that an Estate would Bring in by this mode, could they have it rented would bring £1000. They are very indifferent Labourers, I think they never Cultivate any Ground as it [should be?] it must be much superior to our Land, for with any Kind of Cultivation it will carry where I am, 5 and 6 Crops of Wheat and Tobacco, x x x so that I think a man that understood Farming ought [to] make Very handsomely for himself, had he any Capital to begin on so that he would be able to have a parcel Cleared at first, whenever that seems Runout Clear a new peice which is there method here. They seem in this part unacquainted with any plan of making Money but such as I have mention'd, there are a Thousand Ways of making Money in Ireland unknown to them here. Which might grow to much advantage to this place. Since the War there is a Land Office Opened, and the Inhabitants since that have explor'd back upwards 5 or 600 Miles farther than Before to a new Country Called Kaintuckey, which have lowered the purchase of lands here and have made Taxes more severe as it is reckon'd the finest Country in the World, affording almost all the necessities of life Spontaneously and the Emigrations from this and other parts to it, are I dare say as much as and more than what is from Britain and Ireland here, there you may go take up what Quantity you please at 20s. ₤. h'd purchase. Lands situated nigh trading Towns on Navigable Rivers and Bays, seems to be advancing as fast in their price here, as in Ireland. They tell me that Land which could 5 years ago could have been purchased for 20s. an ackre now am't to 5£ purchase.

mur'd some who attempted to Survey on the West side of the Ohio, but it is now much hush'd & is only said to be reports.

Brown, James Matthews, Andrew Sprowle, Neil Jameson, Alexander Gordon, John Hardy, Wm. Orange, (resident in England), James Parker, John Cramond, Robert Gilmoure, Samuel Farmer, Joseph Calvert, James Campbell & Co., ropewalk & tanyard; Matthew Rothery's estate (resident in England), Henry Rothery's estate, Peter Bezor, Thos. Applewhite (Barbadoes); John Greenwood (in England), Josiah Deane, Christopher Bustin, James Dawson, John Barrett, Benj. Knight (in England), Richard Symes' estate, Dr. Walter McClurg, Josiah Hodges, Talbot Thompson, Andrew Stevenson, New Distillery Company, Archibold Campbell, Willery Morgan, and Thos. Taylor's estate.

An interesting entry is that which states that ten houses belonging to the parish of Elizabeth City (of course including the Church) valued at £3355 were destroyed on Oct. 6, 1775 by order of the Virginia Convention.

But the People by removing Back has enraged the Indians, so that there is a talk of a General Indian War, & that they have

There are no Emigrants in this part of the Country nor much in any part of Virginia Except Merchants & Mechanics, such in a short time may make fortunes—Yet were these people to come & rent farms here I am sure they could have almost any Quantity at a moderate price, in short they w'd not know what to ask ~~for~~ acre by way of renting but I am sure 5s. or 4s. 6d. would be thought sufficient & yet [I think?] the same industry in Ireland might x x x as well at 12 and 14s.

This Province sends 76 Members to Assembly Yearly. If Jammey Clouney sets out for America I am really distressed on his x x x considering his family and smallness of his stock x x x not imagine what they w'd do untill they w'd get settled. I assure there would be a great deal of hardship and Difficulty attending it more than he can have any Idea of. I have an instance or two of it. But I wish every thing for the Best.

I am afraid I have tried your patience with x x x circumstantial accounts, I beg D'r Uncle that you x x x write to me by first and inform me of the State of the Nation and that of our Friends. Give my kind Love to Aunt and all my Relations. I again Repeat it, pray write to me. I w'd be glad of advice & Directions how I should Conduct myself in which your experience and knowledge of the World has furnish'd you with.

I am D'r with unfeigned respect and wishes for your Happiness your ever affect. Nephew

John Joyce

[Addressed] Rev'd Robert Dickson

Narrow Water near Newry Ireland.

The Commissioners, Richard Kello, Joseph Prentis, Daniel Fisher and Robert Andrews concluded their report as follows:

"To distinguish the manner and amount of the whole loss as set forth in the schedule, we are to note, that 32 houses valued at £1,948, and personal property to the amount of £180, were destroyed by Lord Dunmore the 30th November, 1775; that 19 houses valued at £1,616, and personal property to the amount of £1,305.2.6 were destroyed by the enemy the 1st January, 1776; that 3 houses valued at £114 were destroyed by the enemy on the 21st January, 1776; that 863 houses valued at £110, 807.2.0 and personal property to the amount of £8,085.3.5¼, were destroyed by the troops of the State before the 15th January, 1776, and 416 houses valued at £49,663.6.1¼, with personal property to the amount of £2,707.7.9 were destroyed by order of Convention, in February, 1776.